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NEWS

Poll: Pennsylvania voters support participation in climate pact

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The majority of Pennsylvania voters support state participation in a cap-and-trade program to fight climate change, a new poll finds.

A survey — conducted by Climate Nexus, the Yale Program on Climate Change Communication and the George Mason University Center for Climate Change Communication — revealed 72% of Pennsylvania respondents support the state's participation in the Regional Greenhouse Gas Initiative — a move by Gov. Tom Wolf to reduce carbon emissions from power plants.

More than half of respondents, or 56%, said they were more likely to vote for a state representative who supports Pennsylvania participating in RGGI, while 20% said they were less likely to vote for representatives supporting the effort.

Researchers surveyed 659 registered voters in Pennsylvania earlier this month, and the majority of respondents said joining RGGI would benefit the state by improving air quality, protecting human health and fighting climate change.

Fifty-six percent said the initiative would boost the state's economy, while 21% said it would hurt. Forty percent believed it would have a positive impact on their electricity bill.

“They recognize that this program can bring many benefits to the state,” said Dr. Edward Maibach, director of George Mason University's Center for Climate Change Communication.

The Pennsylvania Environmental Quality Board on Tuesday voted 13-6 in favor of a draft

regulation allowing Pennsylvania to enter the multi-state program. The Department of Environmental Protection will accept 60 days of public comment and hold five hearings on the proposal in the coming months.

The state would be the first major fossil-fuel producer to join RGGI, a 10-state cap-and-trade program limiting carbon dioxide emissions from electric power plants. Wolf signed an executive order last year directing the DEP to draft regulations qualifying Pennsylvania for the program, which would set a price and limit on gas emissions from qualifying plants.

Power companies would purchase permits from the state based on the pollution they produce, and money generated would be reinvested in Pennsylvania.

The poll examined voters' views on options for using these funds, and more than 70% said they would be more likely to support RGGI if proceeds were invested in training workers for clean energy jobs, expanding energy efficiency programs for homes and businesses to lower consumer bills and boosting economic development in farming communities that produce renewable energy.

Most respondents also supported incentives to boost production of renewable energy, reduce utility bills of low-income Pennsylvanians through energy-saving programs and expand renewable energy access to communities of color.

Seventy-eight percent want the state to provide job training, guaranteed wages or other assistance to coal and natural gas workers who lose their jobs as a result of the market transition to renewable energy sources.

Overall, 76% of respondents considered climate change to be a serious problem, with nearly half of voters saying it is "very serious." More than 70% also supported the state updating and strengthening regulations to restrict the release of methane from natural gas wells, pipelines and storage facilities.

"Pennsylvania voters are worried about climate change," said Dr. Anthony Leiserowitz, director of the Yale Program of Climate Change Communication. "And they want their state government to act, including accelerating the transition from fossil fuels to clean energy."